

## Finding Grey-necked Picathartes in Korup National Park, Cameroon

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The Grey-necked Picathartes *Picathartes oreas* attracts the interest of ornithologist and eco-tourist alike, but has been difficult to see because of lack of accessible observation sites. Picathartes are widespread in appropriate habitat in Korup National Park (KNP) and the Korup Project Area (KPA)<sup>1</sup> and near Mamfe<sup>2</sup> in Cameroon as well as in Cross River National Park, Nigeria<sup>3</sup>. Since 1993 an area with many picathartes nesting sites in southern KNP has been served by a network of trails and camps, making it possible to see the birds during the June-November nesting period.

KNP (1259 km<sup>2</sup>) was established in 1986 in the rainforest of south-western Cameroon. Two years later the Korup Project was begun by WWF-UK and the Government of Cameroon with assistance, at various times since, from GTZ, WCS, ODA and U.S.AID. The project's goal is to protect and develop the park, not only by interventions in the park itself, but also by assistance for development in the areas surrounding the park (rural development, agroforestry, conservation education). Since 1988 the Park Conservator and Park Adviser (WWF) have worked as a team at KNP. Amongst other things, they have created an infrastructure for tourism and scientific research in the park. From park headquarters in Mundemba it is not far to the park entrance, a suspension bridge of 120 m span over the Mana River. From here there are 120 km of maintained foot trails (there are no roads in the park) and four camps with shelters, kitchens and latrines. Two of these camps are in the Picathartes nesting area.

There is an area of about 50 km<sup>2</sup> in southern KNP where Gneiss boulder piles (some with caves underneath), outcrops and cliffs are found scattered over a landscape of rolling hills and swampy valleys. During 1992-93 a network of foot trails (many following old elephant trails) was opened in this region to bring visitors to mountain lookout points and interesting caves and rock formations. The discovery of so many picathartes nesting sites on the faces of these cliffs and boulders was fortuitous. Fig 1 is a sketch map showing the network of trails and camps in the picathartes area.

The largest known nest site is at Picathartes Knoll, a boulder-covered hill about 1.5 km from Rengo Camp and 180 m north of Hunter's Trail (#1 on map). About 30 nests were found there in 1993. Three other nesting sites are found along Hunter's Trail to the east (Hunter's Cave West, Rockfowl Cave, Hunter's Cave East). Just to the north is Cave Hill (#3 on map, Hill 258 on topographical maps) with many nests on the boulder-strewn hilltop. Very extensive rockfall areas on the northwest and north bases of this hill should be explored for more nesting sites. Cave Hill is about 4 km from either Rengo or Chimpanzee camps. Closer to Chimpanzee Camp are Hunter's Cave North (northwest of Cave Hill), Big Boulder (#4) and Bat Cave (#5) with a few nests each. One should search for nesting sites on the cliffs of Namata Ledges (#7) and Hill 552 to the north. No nests have been found at Rengo Rock, a 30 m high, 2 ha outcropping in the west of the Gneiss rock area, but there could be boulder piles in the Q Transect region suited to nesting.

Most nesting activity occurs during August-November, but new nest building was already in progress on Cave Hill on 8 June 1994. Most nests are 3-5 m above the ground on vertical or outward sloping boulder or cliff-faces (not inside caves). Nests have been found as low as 1.9 m above ground, but these are often destroyed by Chimpanzees *Pan troglodytes* and Drills *Papio leucophaeus*. Measurements given by Ash<sup>3</sup> for nests found in neighbouring Nigeria are valid for KNP (outside measurements: 40 cm x 29 cm x 14 cm; inside cup 6 cm x 20 cm). Nests with eggs inspected in 1993 usually contained two eggs, but in a few cases three were present.

Picathartes are shy and easily disturbed at the nest. The building of blinds at Picathartes Knoll was discussed in 1994. No trail was opened to the site to protect it from unauthorised visits. With a couple of blinds in place, guides (all park visitors must have park guides) could bring interested birders here before dawn (a 30 minute walk from Rengo Camp) so as not to cause disturbance. Cave Hill is another potential area for blinds. Although it requires over an hour

to walk here from the established camps, there is a good open air campsite by a stream, often used by park workers, 600 m from the peak. And there may be nesting sites in the boulder-fall near that campsite.

Interested birders will find nearly 400 species of birds in the KPA. Nearby are two other easily accessible birding areas of great interest: The mudflats and mangroves of the Rio del Rey Estuary can be reached by boat from Bulu Beach near Mundemba. Mt. Kupe, east of Kumba, has montane forest birds on its 2000 m high peak. From Douala it is 235 km to Mundemba via Kumba (paved as far as Kumba). A bush-taxi service is available. For those driving their own or hired vehicles, four-wheel drive is highly recommended during the nesting season (wet season). Potential visitors to the area during the heavy rains (late July-September) should bear in mind that, even with four-wheel drive vehicles, reaching Mundemba from Kumba can be extremely time-consuming. It has been known to take more than a day just to drive the Ekondo Titi to Mundemba stretch during this period. Rainfall during August averages a metre!

Information on park fees etc can be obtained from James Culverwell, Park Advisor, Korup Project, WWF Cameroon, BP 2417, Douala, Cameroon (fax 237-432171). James can also provide up-to-date information on access to other parts of the park, eg the ornithologically rich Baro area in the north of the park. Park guides can be arranged at the park information office in Mundemba and at the park headquarters. 🐾

## References

1. Rodewald, P.G., Dejaifve, P.-A. and Green, A.A. 1994. The birds of Korup National Park and Korup Project Area, Southwest Province, Cameroon. *Bird Conserv. Int.* 4: 1-68.
2. Moore, A. 1974. Cameroon Bare-headed Rockfowl. *Nigerian Fld.* 39(4): 188-190.
3. Ash, J.S. 1991. The Grey-necked Picathartes *Picathartes oreas* and Ibadan Malimbe *Malimbus ibadanensis* in Nigeria. *Bird Conserv. Int.* 1: 93-106.

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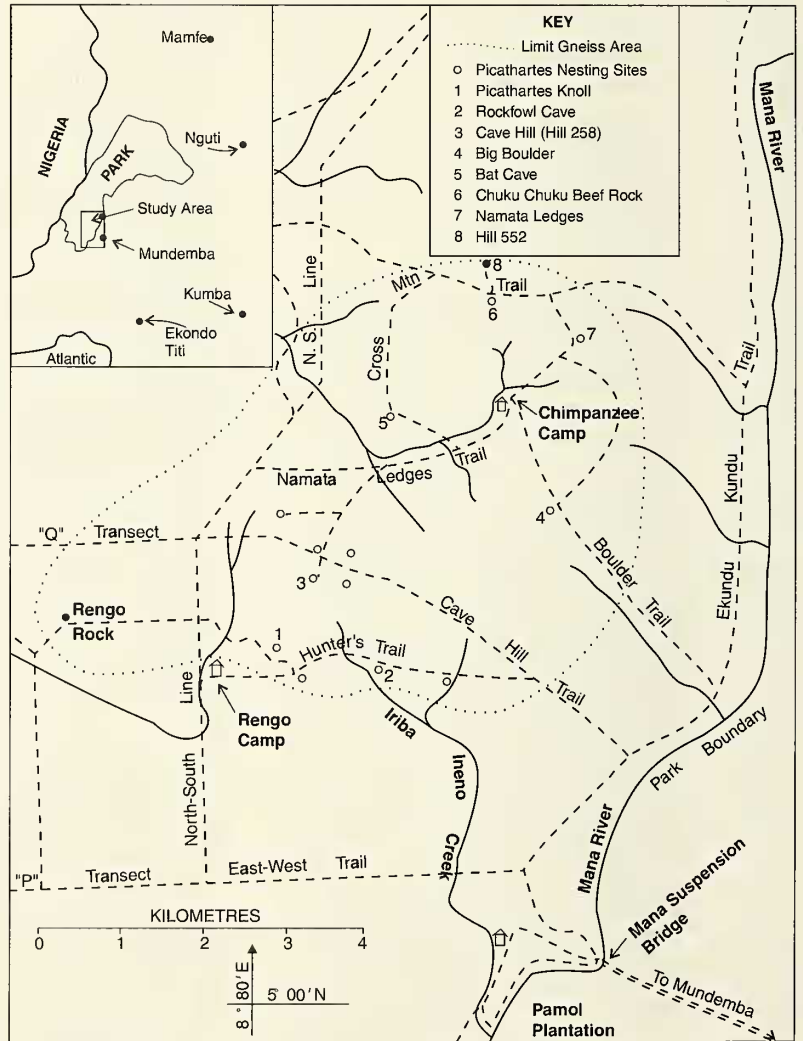


Figure 1 Map of foot trails, campsites and picathartes nesting sites in southern Korup National Park, Cameroon.

Figure 1 Carte des sentiers pédestres, campements et sites des nids de Picathartes dans le sud du Parc national de Korup, Cameroun.